

Bridesmaid Ball wins Shears prelude again - February 28, 2010

Te Kuiti veteran Dean Ball today (sunday) retained his Pahiatua Shears title and set his sights on ending a luckless run at the Golden Shears where he has shorn in 11 of the last 12 finals, without winning the big title. Ball had to rely on his quality to overcome the best of the best after being third off the board in the five-man race over 20 sheep in the final shkaedown before the 50th Golden Shears starting in Masterton on Wednesday.

The pace was fought-out by Hawke's bay guns and former Golden Shears champions John Kirkpatrick and Dion King, Kirkpatrick just taking the time-honours in 16 minutes 26.07 seconds.

Ultimately Ball won by 0.016pts from Kirkpatrick, with 1.2pts to King, and more than another point to Golden shears icon David Fagan, of Te Kuiti.

Fifth was World champion and Taranaki shearer Paul Avery who headed the five qualifiers for the final, separated by less than a point and with Fagan posted fastest semi-final time of 9min 36sec for 10 sheep.

Fagan had already seen his Golden shears odds tightened by the TAB after winning the Taumarunui Jamboree open final on Friday night, while king won Saturday's open title at the Apiti Sports.

Kirkpatrick, the 2002 and 2008 Golden Shears champion and still a \$2.50 favourite to win a third title, was runner-up in all three weekend events.

The major surprise today was early elimination of younger Hawke's Bay hope Cam Ferguson. One of 44 shearers in the heats, he failed to make the cut of 20 for the quarterfinals.

Fagan also yesterday cemented favouritism for the PGG Wrightson National title, by taking top qualifying pace in the 12 for the semi-finals in Masterton next Saturday morning. As well as chasing a 17th Golden Shears open and a place in the New Zealand team for this year's World Championships, he will be aiming for a 10th win in the event, incorporating the McSkimming Memorial and variously known in the past as the Caltex National and the DB Draught National.

The 12 ewere decided on points for placing in the heats at Alexandra (finewool), Waimate (fullwool), Christchurch (corriedale), Raglan (lambs) and Pahiatua (second shear).

Earlier, Gisborne teenager Wi Ngarangione maintained an unbeaten record in seven intermediate competitions from Gisborne to Wairarapa this season, and Kimbolton teenager Sarah Goss won her first junior title. She is the daughter of 1980s Golden Shears intermediate champion Alan Goss and 2007 open woolhandling champion Ronnie Goss.

RESULTS of the Pahiatua Shears on Sunday, February 28, 2010 :

Open final (20 sheep): Dean Ball (Te Kuiti) 16min 38.76sec, 62.538pts, 1; John Kirkpatrick (Napier) 16min 26.07sec, 62.554pts, 2; Dion King (Napier) 16min 27.72sec, 63.786pts, 3; David Fagan (Te Kuiti) 16min 49.03sec, 65.152pts, 4; Paul Avery (Toko, Stratford) 17min 25.23sec, 66.142pts.

Senior final (10 sheep): Aaron Haynes (Feilding) 11min 6.24sec, 44.512pts, 1; Tipene Te Whata (Tautoro) 11min 38.32sec, 48.516pts, 2; Matene Mason (Masterton) 11min 49.96sec, 49.298pts, 3; Tama Niania (Gisborne) 11min 29.31sec, 50.266pts, 4; Bevan Guy (Kaeo) 12min 22.7sec, 52.135pts, 5.

Intermediate final (6 sheep): Wi Ngarangione (Gisborne) 9min 14.52sec, 38.893pts, 1; Te Atakura (-) 10min 4.4sec. 40.22pts, 2; Brook Todd (Dipton) 8min 16.03sec, 40.469pts, 3; Tysson Hema (Waipukurau) 10min 26.48sec, 44.491pts, 4; Linton Palmer (Dipton) 10min 26.09sec, 45.304pts, 5.

Junior final (5 sheep): Sarah Goss (Kimbolton) 10min 33.67sec, 40.684pts, 1; Brett Roberts (Mataura) 9min 46.1sec, 41.705pts, 2; Cameron Hicks (Marton) 9min 59.34sec, 44.567pts, 3; Jack Fagan (Te Kuiti) 10min 20.76sec, 45.038pts, 4; Cody Beck (Taumarunui) 10min 32.35sec, 47.418pts, 5.

Qualifiers for the semi final of the PGG Wrightson National Round-Up to be shorn at the Golden Shears in Masterton next Saturday morning (in order of qualifying): David Fagan (Te Kuiti) 1, John Kirkpatrick (Napier) 2, Nathan Stratford (Invecargill) 3, Jerome McCrea (Whanganui) 4, James Fagan (Te Kuiti) 5, Grant Smith (Rakaia) 6, Jason Win (Ikamatua) 7, Cam Ferguson (Waipawa) 8, Matt Tumohe (Balclutha) 9, Tony Coster (Rakaia) 10, Andy Mainland (Invecargill) 11, Angus Moore (Ward) 12.

Odds tighten on Fagan shears hopes - February 28, 2010

The TAB has moved quickly to tighten the odds on veteran reigning Golden Shears champion David Fagan winning the title for a 17th time after his win over most of his leading challengers in the Taumarunui Jamboree final on Friday night.

The 48-year-old Fagan opened as third favourite paying \$6 but wary of last year's outcome when Fagan won after opening at even greater odds, the TAB has shortened Fagan to \$4, an equal second-favourite with World Champion Paul Avery.

TAB bookmaker Kieran McAnulty said the odds were tightened because of Fagan's "recent show of form and subsequent punter interest," but Shearing Sports New Zealand rankings leader John Kirkpatrick remains at his opening price of \$2.50.

The TAB may today reassess the odds on Napier shearer Dion King who yesterday chalked-up his third win in just over a month back from Australia, heading Kirkpatrick and then Fagan home in the Apiti Sports final in Manawatu. King opened at \$15.

Top shearers today (sunday) competing at the Pahiatua Shears. The 50th anniversary Golden Shears start in Masterton on Wednesday, with the big Open final next Saturday night.

Fagan win heats up shears race - February 26, 2010

Shearing icon and reigning Golden Shears champion David Fagan swept back into winning form again at the Taumarunui Jamboree tonight, just a week out from a bid for a 17th Golden Shears open title in Masterton.

Despite his age, the 48-year-old Fagan was second off the board in a six-man final, almost six seconds after the new-kid-on-the-block, 25-year-old Central Hawke's Bay shearer Cam Ferguson.

Ferguson shored his 20 sheep in 15 minutes 53.06 seconds, but lost valuable points in the pen judging. Fagan picked up enough quality points to claim his fourth win of the season, and move into third place on Shearing Sports New Zealand's national rankings.

Less than 1.3 points covered the first four places however, with No 1 ranked 2002 and 2008 Golden Shears champion John Kirkpatrick, of Napier, second, World champion and 2005 and 2007 Golden Shears champion Paul Avery, from Taranaki, third, and Ferguson slipping to fourth place.

Southland hope Darin Forde was fifth and younger gun Adam Brausch, of Dannevirke were fifth and sixth.

Fagan gets generous odds as TAB opens Golden Shears pool - February 23, 2010

The TAB has dangled a carrot before shearing punters by listing Golden Shears icon and veteran reigning champion David Fagan only third favourite to retain his title in the 50th anniversary open championship in Masterton next week.

The 48-year-old from Te Kuiti, winner of both the 30th and 40th anniversary finals in securing 16 Golden Shears open championship titles from 1986 to his tumultuous triumph 12 months ago, was paying \$6 when the book opened today, a week earlier than last year. The opening favourite is the No 1 ranked competitor in the country, 2002 and 2008 champion and reigning New Zealand open champion John Kirkpatrick, of Napier, quoted at \$2.50, while World champion and 2005 and 2007 winner Paul Avery, who farms at Toko, near Stratford, was paying \$4 to win the title.

The only other shearer paying single-figures, paying \$9, is Waipawa gun Cam Ferguson, the 2004 senior champion, more than 10 years young than the more favoured hopes and aiming for a first time in the six-man final which has been a sporting and rural showpiece since it was first held in 1961.

Te Kuiti shearer Dean Ball, who has made the final 11 times in the last 12 years without winning the major prize, and 2006 champion Dion King, of Napier, are next at \$15, therefore the two others considered most likely to make the final, from which the winner will gain the first of two machine-shearing places in the New Zealand team at this year's World Championships in Wales.

Odds have been listed for 30 shearers, just under a third of those lining-up in the heats on the afternoon of the third day of the golden jubilee shears, heralding a tense, four-stage day-and-a-half culminating in the final on the night of March 6.

The win pool is, however, just one of several options being offered by an excited TAB, with Masterton-based shearing bookie Kieran McAnulty saying there are hopes of carrying the momentum forward to other shearing events in the future.

Already open is head-to-head betting, in which punters can go for the best result between 2008 World Championship teammates John Kirkpatrick (\$1.52) and Paul Avery (\$2.40), veteran David Fagan (\$1.57) vs. up-and-comer Cam Ferguson (\$2.30), or perennial winless finalist Dean Ball (\$1.87) vs. past-champion Dion King (\$1.87).

Mr McAnulty said a top-three (place) option is expected to be available, Transtasman shearing test betting will open with the Kiwis clear favourites at \$1.20, against the Australians' \$4.20, and a pool will open next Monday on the PGG Wrightson National Round-Up, following confirmation of the 12 qualifiers for its culmination during the Golden Shears.

Mr McAnulty said: "The TAB has never previously offered so many betting opportunities on the Golden Shears and with the whole event attracting considerable attention from New Zealanders we expect a large amount of interest from our punters."

"This is a fantastic opportunity for punters to get involved in what is an important event in New Zealand's sporting calendar and cultural identity. We look forward to providing punters with further option for other shearing events, such as the New Zealand Shearing Champs (in Te Kuiti in April) and the World Championship."

The Golden Shears Championship will be awarded on a combination of time, job and quality penalties, with the lowest score winning. The time is calculated at a point for every 20 seconds, with job points being recorded by judges on the board as the sheep are shorn and quality points by judges in the pens after each sheep have been shorn. As always this year sees an impressive array of local and overseas shearers vying for world shearing's greatest honour.

"The Golden Shears is the ultimate accolade for any international shearer which always brings the best out of each competitor. Although we have named our favourites the TAB is fully aware of the genuine possibility of an upset this year, especially with it being the 50th anniversary, everyone is desperate to get their name on the trophy," Mr. McAnulty said, and the TAB is not ruling-out an upset from the overseas brigade, headed by Whangamomona-based scotsman and three-times finalist Gavin Mutch (\$25), while top Australian and 2000 and 2005 World Champion Shannon Warnest is considered to have the job ahead of him, paying \$200.

"These boys have hearts the size of Rimu Trees, so really any competitor who qualifies for the Open Final can take it out," Mr McAnulty said.

"The New Zealand Racing Board holds a commitment to increasing the profile of Shearing by passing a proportion of funds placed with the TAB back to Shearing Sports New Zealand, so we see expanding our betting opportunities to include such options as Top 3, Head to Head, PGG Wrightson National Circuit Final and the Trans-Tasman Test as an expansion of that commitment," he said.

Golden Shears open final win odds released today were:

\$2.50: John Kirkpatrick.

\$4: Paul Avery

\$6:, David Fagan.

\$9: Cam Ferguson

\$15: Dean Ball, Dion King

\$25: Jerome McCrea, Nathan Stratford, Gavin Mutch, Jason Win

\$40: Digger Balme, Adam Brausch

\$80: David Buick, Alton Devery, James Fagan, Darin Forde, Tony Coster, Grant Smith

\$100: Andy Mainland, Phil Wedd, James Mack, Angus Moore, Ringa Paewai, Matthew Smith

\$150: Eli Cummings, Ian Kirkpatrick Jnr, Shane Rawlinson

\$200: Ryan Miller, Rodney Macdonald, Shannon Warnest

Timely shears win as nephew beats uncle at Murchison - February 22, 2010

Young Ikamatua shearer Rhys Liddell came up with a timely spot of form to beat uncle Sam Win in the Murchison Sports shears open final on Saturday.

The win, his second in open-class after breaking-through at the Golden Bay A and P Show in Motueka last month confirmed as one of the better Tasman and West Coast region prospects at the 50th anniversary Golden Shears in Masterton next week.

But, aged just 21 and therefore one of the youngest of more than 100 shearers entered in the prestigious Golden Shears Open championship, he has no illusions about his ambitions, in just his second season in the top grade.

"I was ninth in the Intermediate grade, I last went to Golden Shears in 2007 and this is the first time I've been back," he said from Dunedin, where he was spending a few days before heading back to his base near Nelson for a few days' shearing before Masterton.

His goal will be to qualify for the quarterfinals, the famed Top 30 Shootout which traditionally sets the Golden Shears alight on the second of its three nights each year.

But, he confessed: "I've been a bit silly. I don't get into it as much as I should, and I'm sure I'd do a bit better if I did."

Saturday's win, in only his fifth competition of the season, was a second triumph over uncle Sam Win, but not one he expected.

"The sheep were a bit dry-cutting, and my gear wasn't cutting very well," he said.

He shored his 20 sheep in 21min 4sec to be first off the board, three seconds before leading Marlborough-based shearer Chris Jones, of Renwick, and putting a sheep-around his uncle who finished in 22min 46sec. When time points and points from the board and pen judging were counted, Liddell beat his uncle and runner-up by a gaping 7.6pts, with Jones relegated to third place after breaching a quality standard.

Liddell appreciates the Golden Shears is a big step-up from the shows he has contested to date, mainly within his region. His toughest competition of the season was at Reefton, where he was 20th of 29 shearers in the heats and went no further, in a competition eventually won by cousin Jason Win.

Kiwis draw first blood in Welsh shear tests - February 21, 2010

New Zealand shearer John Kirkpatrick and James Fagan started their chase for payback after dropping two tests of a four-match series against Wales in Wales last year with a comfortable win as a new home series opened at the Southern Shears in Gore on Saturday.

The match, against World Championships hopefuls Gareth Daniel and Gareth Evans, was the first of four in a series which ends at the New Zealand championships in Te Kuiti in April.

Despite an ultimate gap of almost 10pts, it was however a heartwarming effort for the tourists who more-than-matched the New Zealanders, with Daniel winning the race for time points, completing 10 sheep in 9min 43.08sec, 12 seconds ahead of Kirkpatrick who was the second-man-off.

Kirkpatrick easily overcame the time points deficit of 0.8 by putting in the best quality performance, at least 4.8pts better than any of the other three in the contest.

The Welsh woolhandling team was also shut-out in a match against a Southern Shears Region team.

Competition Results are [available here](#)

Hawke's Bay guns fire in Southern Shears - February 21, 2010

Hawke's Bay shearers scored a second successive cleansweep of the top three placings in major South Island competitions in dominating two open class finals at the 45th Southern Shears in Gore last night (Saturday)

The big win went to Hastings-based Dion King in the Southern Shears open, in which four of the six finalists were from Hawke's Bay, despite the competition drawing the best field of the season in which

the big prize, from next month's Golden Shears in Masterton and the New Zealand Championships in Te Kuiti in April, is selection in the New Zealand team for this year's World Championships in Wales.

Cam Ferguson, of Waipawa, was runner-up, John Kirkpatrick, of Napier, third and Dannevirke shearer Adam Brausch was fifth. The South Island, without a win in the event since 1994, was represented by Invercargill shearer Nathan Stratford, who was fourth, and Winton shearer Darin Forde, sixth.

A week earlier it was also a Hawke's Bay trifecta at the Otago championships in Balclutha, where Ferguson was the winner. Last night he rubbed the salt further into the southern wounds by winning the South Island Shearer of the Year final, in which five-times winner and King Country icon David Fagan was second.

Fagan fell out of the race for a 12th win in the Southern Shears Open when eliminated yesterday in the semi-finals, as was World champion and Taranaki farmer Paul Avery.

The open woolhandling final featured a unique and surprise quinella, with Tia Potae, of Milton, taking the title for the first time, and Tokomaru Bay-based sister Monica the runner-up. Third in the final was Christine Tamou, of Gore, and her sister, Sharon Lawton was placed fourth.

None had reached the final at the Otago championships seven days earlier, and among those who failed to qualify yesterday were World champions Sheree Alabaster, of Taihape, and Joanne Kumeroa, of Wanganui, Otago winner Joel Henare, of Gisborne, and New Zealand teammate Keryn Herbert, of Te Awamutu.

The continued successes of the Hawke's Bay shearers, with King having won the Agrodome Shears in January soon after returning from working in Australia, and Kirkpatrick Ferguson heading the season's national rankings with six wins each, sees them likely to head the order-of-favouritism for the March 6 Golden Shears final, expected to be released by the TAB when it opens betting on the 50th anniversary event this week.

A bit of Southland prime stakes out northern raiders - February 18, 2010

At 34 years of age, Southland shearer Nathan Stratford has a lot of people telling him he's in his prime.

But the man himself is not so sure, and as he prepares to again try to block a northern swoop on the top prizes in this weekend's Southern Shears in Gore, he says if he doesn't win now he could have to stay in his "prime" until he's 70.

He faces two big challenges in the Southern Shears Open and the South Island Shearer of the Year, the finals of which are both on Saturday.

Despite being Shearing Sports New Zealand's top-ranked South Island shearer for four of the last five years, he is yet to win either of the events, with just one second placing in the Southern Shears, last year, and runner-up three times in the Shearer of the Year final.

But then, no South Islander has won the Southern Shears final since 1994 when Southland shearer Edsel Forde scored his sixth win in the event. It's been a benefit for King Country icon David Fagan and Hawke's Bay gun John Kirkpatrick almost ever since, and the South Island Shearer of the Year hasn't been won by a South Island shearer since Tuatapere's Alton Devery won four years ago.

Last year, Kirkpatrick completed his fourth double triumph in the two finals in five years, while the South Island elite were also shut-out of the other major title when Gisborne teenager Joel Henare won the open woolhandling final.

Kirkpatrick, 39, and Henare, 18, will be the unofficial favourites to repeat their successes - Kirkpatrick despite being beaten by fellow Hawke's Bay shearer Cam Ferguson in the Otago championships in Balclutha last Saturday, and Henare because of his win at the same venue.

On the chances of a southern breakthrough, and later at the Golden Shears in Masterton and the New Zealand Championships in Te Kuiti, Stratford said: "I'd like to think there's a show...but I'm not sure. Everyone's got a chance, if they get a good shear on the day."

He quickly listed With the Southern Shears including the South Island leg of an inter-island challenge, and the first three in last year's North Island Shearer of the Year final in Te Kuiti, both the open shearing and open woolhandling events have drawn the best fields in New Zealand this season, including three top competitors who were not at Balclutha.

World champion shearer Paul Avery, the Southern Shears winner in 2007 and the only shearer apart from Kirkpatrick and Fagan to win the title since 1999, is expected from his farm in Taranaki, along with another King Country gun Dean Ball who, aged 42, has won two recent open titles in Bay of Plenty. And World woolhandling champion Sheree Alabaster will arrive from Taihape to join the closeknit competition's celebration of 21 years of woolhandling events at the Southern Shears.

Stratford says Kirkpatrick, Fagan, Avery, Ball and Ferguson are all hot prospects, but there others including Hawke's Bay's Dion King, who tied Avery in 2007 and was beaten only on a countback of quality points. But he nominates a couple of other Southland hopes in three-times Shearer of the Year winner Darin Forde and another up-and-coming prospect in the aptly-named Andy Mainland.

At least 170 competitors are expected to compete in the Shears, which also include shearing and woolhandling tests against Wales, and competition in the senior, intermediate and junior shearing grades, and senior and junior woolhandling.

Winners of the three major events at the Southern Shears over the last 18 years:

Southern Shears Open: 1992 Alan MacDonald, 1993 Edsel Forde, 1994 Edsel Forde, 1995 Alan MacDonald, 1996 David Fagan, 1997 David Fagan, 1998 David Fagan, 1999 Digger Balme, 2000 David Fagan, 2001 David Fagan, 2002 John Kirkpatrick, 2003 John Kirkpatrick, 2004 John Kirkpatrick, 2005 John Kirkpatrick, 2006 John Kirkpatrick, 2007 Paul Avery, 2008 John Kirkpatrick, 2009 John Kirkpatrick.

South Island Shearer of the Year: 1992 Edsel Forde, 1993 David Fagan, 1994 Gerald Hoera, 1995 Darin Forde, 1996 David Fagan, 1997 Dion Morrell, 1998 David Fagan, 1999 Darin Forde, 2000 Alton Devery, 2001 David Fagan, 2002 James Fagan, 2003 Darin Forde, 2004 John Kirkpatrick, 2005 John Kirkpatrick, 2006 Alton Devery, 2007 James Fagan, 2008 John Kirkpatrick, 2009 John Kirkpatrick.

Open Woolhandling: 1992 Aroha Newby, 1993 Raelene Howes, 1994 Joanne Kumeroa, 1995 Huia Clarke, 1996 Huia Clarke, 1997 Oti Mason, 1998 Joanne Kumeroa, 1999 Patrick Shelford, 2000 Dayna te Aho, 2001 Joanne Kumeroa, 2002 Sharon Lawton, 2003 Sharon Lawton, 2004 Joanne Kumeroa, 2005 Lisa Fagan, 2006 Angelique Gage, 2007 Joanne Kumeroa, 2008 Gina Nathan, 2009 Joel Henare.

Welsh Shearing Tour - February 15, 2010

The Welsh shearing and woolhandling team had mixed results in two matches during the Otago championships which were held in Balclutha on Friday and Saturday.

The woolhandling team was beaten in its first test against New Zealand, but the shearing team recovered from a loss in it's opening regional match last week to beat an Otago regional selection in a contest over eight sheep.

Results of the internationals, and other events during the championships are [available here](#)

Te Puke A&P Shearing Results - February 15, 2010

Te Kuiti veteran Dean Ball won his second open-class shearing title in Bay of Plenty in three weeks when he beat World champion and Taranaki farmer Paul Avery in the Te Puke A and P show final on Saturday.

Ball, 42, won the Tauranga show title on January 23, and has been a consistent finalist since the Shearing Sports New Zealand competition season resumed last month.

Although beaten off the board by more than 45 seconds as Avery whipped through 15 sheep in 12min 29.6sec, Ball's quality was superior and he ultimately snatched the win by just 0.125pts.

With most of the country's other top open-class shearers at the Otago championships in Balclutha, Ball and Avery finished well clear of the other two finalists, first year open-class shearer Mark Grainger, of te Kuiti, and Taihape's Riki Chase.

There was particular interest in the veterans grade as older shearers dust-off their mocassins and sharpen their combs and cutters for the 50th Golden Shears veterans event in Masterton in three weeks' time. Saturday's old-timers event was won by former Golden Shears perennial competitor John Hand who shored three sheep in just under 4min 20sec, and scored a three-points win over runner-up and 1967 Golden Shears intermediate champion Hugh McCarroll, who shored his three sheep in 5min 38sec.

Results of the Te Puke A and P Show Shears are [available here](#).

Cam shafts shears guns as Otago title stays in Hawke's Bay - February 14, 2010

Central Hawke's Bay shearer Cam Ferguson has made his strongest case for rolling the big veteran guns in the race for places at this year's World Championships year by winning the prestige Otago Championship open title in Balclutha.

Ferguson, 26, was third off the board in what was an all-Hawke's Bay race for time-honours in the final on Saturday, which ended with the Bay stretching an Otago Open stranglehold to its sixth year, but picked-up enough points in judging to head off Napier gun and four-times winner John Kirkpatrick by 0.15pts. Hastings-based Dion King, the 2007 winner who is home from Australia to challenge for the big titles, was third.

Kirkpatrick was first finished the 20 sheep in 17min 31.09sec, with five seconds to King, another five to Ferguson, and almost 38 seconds more to Te Kuiti's James Fagan, with Invercargill shearer Nathan Stratford tailing the five-man field in 19min 6.05sec. Ferguson had been top qualifier after the semi-finals, in which King Country icon David Fagan was eliminated...

The championships were the first leg of a traditional but unofficial four-week grand slam dating back almost 40 years and which continues at next weekend's southern Shears in Gore and culminates in Masterton's Golden shears next week, where the Open championship carries with it the first of two black-singlet places at the World Championships in Wales.

Missing from Balclutha was reigning World champion Paul Avery who competed at Te Puke and had to settle for second to another championships team aspirant in Dean Ball, of Te Kuiti.

Gisborne teenager and New Zealand trans-tasman series representative Joel Henare retained his New Zealand Woolhandler of the Year title at Balclutha, his third title of the post-Christmas stage of the season and firming favouritism to take one of the two World championships woolhandling berths in a selection trial to be held during the Golden Shears.

Teaming with Te Awamutu's Keryn Herbert, Henare also featured in New Zealand's woolhandling test match win over the Welsh World championships team of Bronwen Tango and Meinir Evans, but there was some cause for celebration in the Welsh camp after shearers Gareth Daniel and Gareth Evans beat an Otago regional team of Owaka shearers Simon Bradfield and Bruce Walker in a final shakedown before meeting Kirkpatrick and James Fagan in Gore in the first of four tests on a two-month tour.

In the senior final in Balclutha, Invercargill shearer Nick Pyper beat teenaged New Zealand intermediate and Australian senior crossbred champion Matene Mason, of Masterton, by seven-tenths of a point, the intermediate title was won by Australian Corey Mifsud and school-aged Brett Roberts, of Matura, won the junior title.

Gisborne's Choppy Pattison won the senior woolhandling final, while Ngahuia Thwaites, of Masterton, maintained winning form in major southern junior competitions.

All out to shear the Grand Slam - February 11, 2010

More than 200 shearers and woolhandlers are heading for the small Otago town of Balclutha for the start of an unofficial shearing Grand Slam which culminates in the Golden Shears open final just over three weeks' time.

The Grand Slam, a part of New Zealand shearing for almost 40 years, starts at the Otago championships, which start tomorrow (Friday) with lower class heats and culminate with the Open-class shearing and woolhandling events on Saturday. On successive weekends top guns from throughout the country will also be in Gore for the Southern Shears, in Northern Wairarapa for the Pahiatua Shears and in Masterton for the 50th anniversary Golden Shears.

But it is eight years since the open championship Grand Slam was last achieved, by King Country shearing icon David Fagan who did it five times - in 1991, in successive years in 1996-1998 and in 2001. In all five years he also won the New Zealand open championship finals in home-town which Te Kuiti, revived from the first staging of the King Country Shears in 1985, and in 1996 and 1998 he also won the World title.

With the now 48-year-old Fagan having won 16 Golden Shears opens from 1986 to the emotion of last year's triumph as the oldest to win shearing's most coveted title, there have been few opportunities to claim the Grand Slam, the only other person to have achieved it having been 1977-78 and 1990 Golden Shears winner Roger Cox.

At home preparing for a flight south in time for a Friday-night speedshear in Balclutha and another tilt at the big titles, Fagan said today that while he was aware of the four-week succession of major titles, it hadn't dawned on him that among 595 open shearing titles in 28 seasons of open-class shearing was even one Grand Slam.

"I had never looked at it that way," he said... "I'd like to win everything...four's not enough."

But then, conversely, came the real object of the annual inter-island exercise as he said: "The one to win is at Masterton. If you don't win the golden shears, you're not really remembered for anything."

The closest to the Grand Slam in recent years was Napier shearer John Kirkpatrick two years ago, when his only blemish was in being beaten in the Pahiatua Shears final by Taranaki gun Paul Avery, who eight months later also beat Kirkpatrick in the World Championships final in Norway.

Fagan remains clear Kirkpatrick will be favourite for the Masterton event, which carries one of the two places in the New Zealand machine shearing team for this year's World Championships in Wales.

Kirkpatrick is going for a third Balclutha-Gore double in a row, but the competition will be tough with Fagan, fellow Hawke's Bay shearers Dion King and Cam Ferguson, and Wanganui's Jerome McCrea expected in the field, along with souther hopes Darin Forde, Nathan Stratford, Tony Coster, Grant Smith and Jason Win all trying to be the first South Islander to win the Otago open title since Forde triumphed in 2000.

Gisborne teenager Joel Henare is expected to defend his New Zealand Woolhandler of the Year title, with tough opposition as competitors begin the countdown to Masterton where two people will be chosen to defend the two woolhandling World titles in Wales.

Henare won a finewool event in the South Island at the start of the season but mentor Joanne Kumeroa, of Wanganui, won the last crossbred and corriedale shows at Waimate and Christchurch a few weeks later.

While other top shearers contested events at Dannevirke and Marton last Friday and Saturday, or for South Island shearers the Reefton show, Fagan stayed close to home by shearing at Aria, where he won a Friday night speedshear and on Saturday heading a restricted field of 14 to win the open title at the Aria Sports, possibly the longest-running shearing competition in New Zealand, having been contested every year since 1956.

"It's only 10 minutes down the road," he said, though he might have travelled further afield had it not been for the rush getting back from Thursday's AC/DC concert in Auckland.

Welsh keep smiling after defeat in shears tour opener - February 07, 2010

Welsh shearers Gareth Daniel and Gareth Evans were still smiling despite being beaten by West Coast father and son Sam and Jason Win on Saturday in the opening match of an eight-show, four-test New Zealand tour.

In a highlight at the centennial Reefton A and P Show, the Welsh pair conceded a deficit of almost six points in the contest of over 10 woolly romney lambs each, which caught the visitors by surprise.

But, based in the King Country since before Christmas and shearing with Te Kuiti contractor, open-class veteran and former New Zealand representative Dean Ball, and having arrived on the Coast only on the morning of the event, the Welsh still derived some reward for their first trip into the South Island.

Despite Jason Win having shorn almost nine seconds a sheep quicker, Daniel turned the tables with a comfortable win over the West Coast gun in the final of a one-lamb speedshear at the Inangahua Arms Hotel a few hours afterwards.

Daniel, a 27-year-old from Machynlleth in Mid-Wales and who represented Wales at the 2008 World Championships in Norway, has now headed for Winton where the pair will be shearing for Southland contractor Jamie McConnachie to prepare for the second match on the tour, against another regional selection during the Otago Championships in Balclutha on Friday and Saturday, when a Welsh woolhandling team will also be competing.

The first test matches are at the Southern Shears in Gore a week later.

Sam Win, 55, described locally as a "one-man-band" organising the shearing competitions in which 600 sheep from the Waipuna property of farmers Ken and Robyn Ferguson were shorn, would have preferred a young shearer had taken part in the match against Wales.

But having said beforehand "they'll have to beat me first" he secured the second place in the team as runner-up to his son in the 20-sheep, four-man final of the Reefton Open, which attracted 29 of the 60 shearers competing in the show.

There was a unique outcome in the intermediate final where the first three were from overseas. The event was won by Australian Corey Mifsud, with second and third going respectively to Welsh shearers Clwyd Jones and Dafydd Roberts, who have both been working in the area.

The international favour was extended further with the appearance of New Zealand-based Scottish shearers Tom Wilson and George Bayne, who featured in a World Championships boilover in Masterton in 1996 by winning the teams title after hot-favourites New Zealand were disqualified in the final.

On Saturday, Wilson won the Open Plate, for the four semi-finalists who missed-out on the open final, and Bayne won a veterans' Shear Classic.

The Reefton competition was one of five Waitangi Day weekend events on the Shearing Sports New Zealand, with current World champions John Kirkpatrick, of Napier, and Paul Avery, of Toko (near Stratford) splitting the open finals spoils at the Dannevirke A and P Centennial Show on Friday and Saturday's North Island Championships and Rangitikei Sports at Marton respectively.

King Country icon David Fagan, a World champion in five individual and six teams events but who was in that vanquished Kiwi team 14 years ago, stayed close to home on Saturday to record career win No 595 at the Aria Sports. It was his 14th open win at the tiny country show since his first in 1988, and his third of the current season.

Another feature of the weekend shows was the Dannevirke and Marton double by Gisborne intermediate shearer Wi Ngarangione, which included completing an unprecedented cleansweep of the intermediate finals at all six eastern coast competitions from Gisborne to Carterton in one season.

The fifth competition during the weekend was the North Kaipara A and P Show at Paparoa.

Small-town NZ set for shear test fever - February 02, 2010

A six-strong Welsh shearing and woolhandling team is about to start its preparations for this year's World Championships at home in Wales with a series of test matches and other events in New Zealand.

Machine shearers Gareth Daniel and Gareth Evans open the team's tour by competing at the Reefton Show, where as well competing in the open class event they will also shear against a regional team comprising the best two local competitors at the only West Coast competition in the Shearing Sports New Zealand season.

It is the first of four matches with regional selections on a tour which also includes a four-test series, as the Welsh try to avenge a whitewash on an historic first test-match tour of New Zealand last summer.

The second will be at the Otago championships in Balclutha a week later, where woolhandlers Bronwen Tango and Meinir Evans start their three-match tour also against a regional selection. The two women will later take part in the first woolhandling test series in New Zealand. Representing New Zealand in the shearing tests will be John Kirkpatrick, of Napier, and James Fagan, of Te Kuiti, both smarting from managing only a two-all draw with Gareth Evans and Welsh compatriot Nicky Beynon in a four-test series in the UK last July, while the woolhandlers will be New Zealand's trans-Tasman series team of Gisborne teenager Joel Henare and Te Awamutu mother Keryn Herbert.

Attempts are being made to also arrange competition for Welsh blade shearers John Till and Elfed Jackson. While a special blade-shearing event is being held at the 50th anniversary Golden Shears in Masterton next month, part of a series to select two New Zealand exponents for the World Championships to be held at the Royal Welsh Show in July, most of the annual New Zealand blade-shearing was completed in a short season before Christmas.

Shearing Sports New Zealand chairman John Fagan says the Welsh visit will showcase international sport in some unique settings, with venues ranging from the tiny northern Manawatu settlement of Apiti, which will host one of the woolhandling events, to Auckland where one of the non-test shearing contests will be held during the Royal Easter Show.

West Coast shearing stalwart and Reefton shearing competition organiser Sam Win, of Ikamatua, would like to see a young team represent his region in the tour opener but says that despite being in his mid-50s he will be fronting-up with the hope of being one of the two to match Daniel and Evans.

With each competition having the choice of how to select its team for the regional matches, the Reefton Show team will be chosen from the heats of its open grade, which Sam Win, the organiser as well as prospective competitor, expects will attract at least 25 entries.

He said: "I thought long and hard about whether I'd give it a go, or let a younger shearer have the chance. But I decided, what the heck, if anyone else is going to get in that team they're going to have to earn it. They're going to have to beat me to it."

The itinerary for the Welsh shearing and woolhandling team's tour is:

Feb 6: Wales v Regional Selection (shearing), at Reefton...

Feb 12-13: Wales v Regional Selections (shearing and woolhandling), at Otago Championships, Balclutha.

Feb 19-20: First Tests - Wales v New Zealand (shearing and woolhandling), at Southern Shears, Gore.

Feb 27: Second woolhandling test - Wales v New Zealand, at Apiti.

Mar 5: Second shearing test - Wales v New Zealand, at Golden Shears, Masterton.

Mar 20: Third shearing test - Wales v New Zealand, at Waimarino Shears, Raetihi.

Mar 28: Wales v Regional Selection (shearing), at Taranaki Shears.

Apr 2-2: Wales v Regional Selection (shearing), at Royal Easter Show, Auckland.

Apr 8-10: Fourth shearing test - Wales v New Zealand, at New Zealand Championships, Te Kuiti.

Victory sweet for the homecoming King - February 01, 2010

World lambshearing record holder and former Golden Shears champion Dion King scored his first win back in New Zealand after several months in Australia when he won the 20-sheep Agrodome Shears open final at the Rotorua A and P Show on Sunday.

King, a Hawke's Bay gun who won the 2006 Golden Shears and who turns 35 this week, had to settle for a well-beaten second off the board as King Country veteran Digger Balme all-but rang a sheep around the whole field.

But he more than made-up for the 40 seconds deficit on time points with a sparkling display of quality shearing on a wet and muggy day to post victory by a comfortable 2.55pts over Balme who managed to survive as runner-up, his best placing of the season. Dean Ball, another King County veteran who a week earlier scored his first win of the season, was third.

King had two wins in New Zealand last summer and shore in both the Golden Shears and New Zealand championships open finals, and joins a growing list of competitors making their presence felt in the buildup to the big events in Masterton in March and Te Kuiti in April leading to Shearing Sports New Zealand naming two machine shearers in its six-strong team for the 14th Golden shears World Shearing and Woolhandling Championships in Wales in July.

Another to step-up the game at the weekend was the youngest of the most genuine World Championships prospects, Waipawa shearer Cam Ferguson, who also banked on quality points to win the Taihape A and P title on Saturday.

Team selection favourite John Kirkpatrick, also of Hawke's Bay, battled both Ball and Balme in the race for fastest time, and finished in 11min 57sec as just six seconds separated the trio. But Ferguson's quality outshone them all, with Ball second after all points were counted, Kirkpatrick third, and Balme fourth.

Gisborne teenager Wi Ngarangione and Hastings-based English shearer Steve Rowberry continued their good form by winning the intermediate and junior titles respectively at both of the weekend competitions. Ngarangione, the country's top-ranked junior last season, has been beaten just once in nine intermediate competitions this season, already forcing his promotion to senior class next season, while Rowberry, who came to New Zealand in October aged 21 and with a Royal Welsh title already to his name and has since won four events down-under, also guaranteeing a regrading at the end of the summer.

Teenaged national woolhandling representative Joel Henare claimed the first North Island woolhandling title since the Christmas break, with a win in Taihape repeating a success of 12 months earlier. Ronnie Goss, of Apiti, was second and World champion Sheree Alabaster, of Taihape, was third.

The top woolhandlers are expected to be all at the Dannevirke Show on Friday and the Rangitikei Sports at Marton on Saturday, continuing the hunt for points to qualify for the World Championships New Zealand team selection finals at the Golden shears next month.